

Gender Issues for Women Teachers in Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical synthesis of literature concerning gender issues for women in Papua New Guinea, with a specific interest in women teachers and women's issues in other developing countries. The review mainly deals with research literature from 1985 onwards and points to particular barriers to women's career advancement in educational systems (e.g. cultural factors, male domination over women, domestic violence, strong family obligations, low levels of girl education, majority of men in leadership positions). The paper is an attempt to accumulate knowledge about inequitable conditions for women teachers in Papua New Guinea, an issue that has received little attention in the extended research on gender issues generally.

Introduction

The problem of gender inequality in the teaching service in Papua New Guinea (PNG) represents a need to critically understand gender issues for women in Papua New Guinea. Reports have consistently drawn attention to the disadvantages faced by PNG women in comparison with those from other countries which are classified by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2007) as having low levels of human development. Traditional culture, including the exercise of male dominance through domestic violence, wife beating, and law and order problems involving rape and assault, are commonly cited as major problems that seriously limit women's capacity to participate actively in employment and skill development.

Cultural influences on roles of women in PNG

The most common explanation given for why women in Papua New Guinea are not recognised as equals in the society is 'cultural factors', or the term more commonly used in the Pacific, 'custom' or '*pasin bilong mipela*' (fashion belong me) (Korare, 2002). Specific cultural and religious beliefs and values typically define femininity in terms of marriage, housekeeping and child-raising. Custom is a very important part of PNG society and even for those who have received a Western education or who live mainly in the urban areas, there is little escape from what is considered customary ways. They take on an almost sacrosanct significance and anyone who dares to ignore them is soon ostracised (Korare, 2002). Because something is considered of traditional

significance, its preservation is automatically perceived as essential (Lawson, 1997).

Anything that appears to be of great antiquity can be portrayed as carrying greater authority in the present (Lawson 1997:2).

Women speak of the importance of culture in their lives, and the need to feel a sense of belonging, yet they are critical of the way in which men are using culture as an excuse to do what they consider is good for them. Many women in PNG view tradition or culture to be unchangeable, and therefore accept the subordinate role as inevitable.

Kanjajit Soin (1998:10). argues that when women believe that differences in status are part of the natural order of things, they are less likely to challenge how society is organized to benefit men more than women. Yet there are many women in PNG who are not prepared to accept this attitude any more, and groups such as the National Council of Women and Women in Politics are encouraging women to challenge inequitable conditions that favour men more than women (Hopkos 2000).

Currently, there is only one woman, Lady Carol Kidu, in PNG's 109-member parliament and she has proven to be a powerful voice on women's issues. The national situation often reflects the situation at the grassroots level, where men also typically hold public political power. Women have minimal opportunity to participate directly in the community decision-making processes and, at times, suffer threats, by men and women, if they successfully enter into the male domain of government (Loveridge & Kotvojs, 2004:67). Through the determination of politicians such as Lady Kidu, a whole package of legislation on rape, sexual assault, child sexual protection, and new rules of evidence — particularly for women and children — was passed in the last sitting of the national parliament prior to the 2002 election.

Garap (2000) reports how one woman spoke of how much her culture meant to her even if it meant embracing *the natural order of things* in order to maintain peace and harmony in the society.

Culture has played an important part in my life as I feel I have to have my roots; otherwise, I would be someone without a tribe. ... I value the customs and even though I am exposed to the gender concept at the same time, as a traditional woman, I also embrace my culture, because it maintains peace and harmony in our society.

(Garap, 2000:162).

Yet, the culture being referred to here is very different today from what it was 50 or even 25 years ago. Traditional cultures are being abused and the essence of culture is being changed. Older women are becoming more and more aware that the custom that they value and respect is not the same today as it was when they were young. Women were respected in the society as wives and mothers and this gave them a certain amount of *power*, maybe not as a spokesperson but

as a decision maker and a force behind the men in her household. Anthropological research (Barlow, 1995; Fergie, 1995; Maschio, 1995) on the traditional role of women supports the view that women in many parts of the country used to have more power in their society than they have today.

Cultural attitudes to roles of women

Papua New Guinea culture is not homogenous. Papua New Guinea is a predominantly Melanesian country of around six million people from more than 800 different language groups and associated cultures. The cultural groups differ in their structure, beliefs, practices, descent and kinship systems, patterns of affiliation and residence and in the organization of their social institutions (Ryan, 1969). There are, however, some features which seem to be common to PNG societies and provide a general framework for the discussion of marriage and attitudes of males to females. This section of the chapter explores the literature to identify views on the traditional roles of women in Papua New Guinea in order to illuminate attitudes and values of men and women to social constructs of gendered roles that may exist with some people in some form to the present day.

The literature presents two broad types of PNG societies that define PNG traditional roles as patrilineal societies and matrilineal societies (Manjor 1999). In a patrilineal society, men are totally in charge of all matters relating to decision making and land matters, whereas women are minders of the men's wealth and well being. Women's roles particularly were in making gardens, raising domestic animals for ceremonial purposes and above all bearing children and raising them. Patrilineal societies are common on mainland PNG. In a matrilineal society women are in complete control over the most important commodity which is the land. However, women still have an obligation to their traditional values as the minders of the men, raising children and domestic animals and gardening. Matrilineal societies are common in the Islands region of PNG (Manjor 1999).

Gasrasu (2002) explored roles of women in matrilineal societies. This means that it is the woman's line that determines kinship and the inheritance and use of land rights. With this go other key responsibilities such as keeping the family wealth and recording family history. From time to time, in consultation with her uncle or elder brother, a woman is also responsible for arranging marriages, organizing the special feasts and cultural activities within the clan and participating in important negotiations around land rights and birthrights. However it has not been usual for women to exercise political power in the public arena, although their views may be conveyed through a male spokesperson in the family or clan.

Gender issues in marriage

Traditionally, the social organization of Papua New Guinean societies was based on the clan or kinship group whose members were tied to each other and with neighbouring clans by a system of exchange. The exchange system

involved creating and dispersing wealth and men's status and social relationships were mediated by wealth. Within this context, marriage played a significant role (Dobunaba, 1995). Marriage was an important means of providing social linkages and political alliances. Young people were never entirely free to arrange their own unions, although the degree of restriction varied.

Marriage payments or bride price are paramount in many PNG societies. Rather than viewing bride price payments as the outright purchase of a woman as a commodity, it is the prevailing view of anthropologists that it is compensation to the woman's family for the loss of a useful and valuable family member and in gratitude for having raised the woman. Although she is not thought of being bought like a piece of livestock, she is in some areas expected to transfer her allegiance completely to her husband's people (Langness, 1964).

It can be argued (Flaherty, 1998) that bride price is detrimental to the status and health of women. Women cannot return to their villages following conflict with their husbands because their bride price has been paid and have been declared the property of the men. This implies that men can do what they want with women. Flaherty contends that this is the type of thing Papua New Guineans should try to change, while maintaining the good values of traditional cultures. Reay (1966) suggests that the notion of marriage as outright purchase now supersedes old ideas of exchange. The idea of bride price as the valuation of the bride is a modern custom. Despite shifts in emphasis, there is no indication that marriage payments will be abolished and while they remain, marriage will retain much of its traditional character.

In the 1980s, PNG's parliament hotly debated whether to make wife-beating a crime under the Criminal Code. A number of members denounced the bill, arguing they had paid bride price and therefore had the right. Lady Kidu, member for Port Moresby South, encountered a similar reaction in the October 2001 sitting of parliament when she tried to have a private member's bill on rape in marriage accepted in parliament. The reaction of many members was that what occurred in the home was not the concern of anyone else.

A woman can do little about adultery by her husband. With no weapon but their tongue, women air their grievance and public vituperation and invoke public shame on the *other* woman (Held, 1957). Men are in a stronger position. A husband who catches his wife in adultery often traditionally had the right to kill both wife and lover.

Polygamy was a traditional norm and is still practiced in some areas. Unlimited polygamy was the ideal and a man's status was related to the number of wives he could acquire, the wealth he could amass to offer them, the number of children they bore him, and the gardens and pigs they could tend for him (Ryan, 1969; Malinowski, 1932). In all polygamous marriages relations between co-wives are a potential source of conflict (Oliver, 1955). A husband's neglect of one wife in favour of another usually causes jealousy and

unhappiness (Read, 1966). A common way of avoiding conflict is to establish each wife and her family in her own house separated as far as possible from those of her co-wives. In the highlands where patterns of settlement are dispersed, co-wives often live some distances apart. Tensions, from this source at least, are minimized.

Relations between sexes in the highlands are characterized by tension and aggression. Sexual relations elsewhere are often fraught with strain, especially in matrilineal areas where a husband may be at some social and economic disadvantage in relation to his wife's relatives. Most wives find it difficult or impossible to negotiate sex with their husbands. Circumstances allowing for sexual negotiation include menstruation, pregnancy, breast feeding, a new garden preparation or tribal fights (Levy 2007:58).

Prior to colonisation men dominated everything. Men decided when to have sex. This is a big problem in the context of HIV/AIDS. Culturally women cannot negotiate.

(HIV/AIDS peer educator, Port Moresby, in Levy, 2007).

Violence against women in PNG

It is a tragedy in PNG that violence against women may be viewed as an attribute of cultural rights that men have over the women in their lives. Violence against women is a reflection of the attitude that women are a commodity of men. Violence against women in the home and the community is pervasive, and in some regions affects most women's lives. Research conducted in Papua New Guinea in the 1980s found that on average two thirds of women had been hit by their partner. In two Highlands provinces included in the study almost one hundred percent of women reported that they had been hit by their partners (Amnesty International, 2007).

A United Nations assessment of Papua New Guinea (2001) reported that violence against women is common, including domestic violence, rape (including pack-rape), and indecent assault. The incidence of such offences is undoubtedly under-reported, especially where offenders belong to the same family or clan. The most common reasons for under-reporting include fear of retaliation by the attacker, cultural stigma, and the belief that such violence is justified as a legitimate aspect of a woman's role (Pickup, Williams & Sweetman, 2001; UNICEF, 2000). Under-recording often occurs where gender-based violence is not considered a crime.

The UN assessment of PNG (2001) reported that the rate of rape and sexual offences in the National Capital (480 per 100,000) was over four times the national average, and 20 times the rate of the province with the lowest rate (24 per 100,000). It is highly likely, however, that rape and other sexual offences are vastly under-reported in rural areas. A key challenge is eliminating violence against women and promoting women's rights through advocacy and training on violence against women as well as sexual harassment and violence against women at work, sensitisation of the justice system, and the piloting of

innovative, rights-based approaches including for HIV/AIDS prevention (United Nations, 2001).

Amnesty International (2006) reported that police and other government agencies were quick to proclaim that violence against women was a problem of enormous proportions in Papua New Guinea and were keen to share, with dismay, the latest horror story from the media about a murdered wife or gang-raped teenager. Violence against women was discussed as inevitability, a problem which would be solved only in the very long term, if at all (Amnesty International 2006).

Research conducted by the Papua New Guinea Medical Research Institute in the early 1990s found that 55 per cent of women interviewed had been forced into sex against their will, mostly by men known to them. In a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Papua New Guinea stated that 'young women all over the country are at high risk of rape, gang rape and other forms of violent sexual assault'. In the same report, reference was made to research that found that 30 per cent of girls and women in one urban settlement had been victims of sexual violence (Amnesty International, 2007).

Gender-based violence not only has a direct impact on the physical and psychological well being of women across the country, it also inhibits the ability of women to move freely in the community and therefore impacts on their ability to participate on an equal basis in all aspects of public life. Amnesty International (2007) argues that gender-based violence impedes women's access to already limited healthcare, education and employment opportunities. At a time when Papua New Guinea is confronting a HIV/AIDS epidemic, gender-based violence also places women at increased risk of infection and limits the effectiveness of awareness raising campaigns which assume that women have control over when and how they have sexual intercourse.

Domestic violence is everywhere. We see all types of women (in the refuge) – expats, wives of politicians, women with well paid jobs – it is not just the women from the village or the settlements.

(Counsellor at a Port Moresby women's refuge,
in Amnesty International, 2007)

Although gender-based violence is pervasive in Papua New Guinea, it would be wrong and indeed misleading, to present the women of Papua New Guinea as a collection of passive, silent victims (Amnesty International, 2007). Many women in Papua New Guinea are also active and vocal agents of change, engaged in a struggle to build safer homes and communities. Although they are grossly under-represented in national and provincial parliaments, in local government, in village courts, in the police force and judiciary, they continue to work towards the prevention of gender-based violence and effective redress for victims.

Gender equity in education and further training

The issue of gender equity is at present a controversial one in the education systems of Papua New Guinea because the country is male dominated in almost all aspects of these systems. Although the government has a *Gender Equity in Education Policy* (Department of Education, 2002), at almost all levels of the education systems (elementary, primary, secondary and tertiary), access to formal education is highly unequal (Shel, 2007). Lady Kidu (1997) argued that education improves a women's role in the workforce and women with some education are able to earn a living to support themselves and their family. Glick and Sahn (1997) found that more education reduces the likelihood of being self-employed and strongly increases the likelihood of working in the public sector. Women's choice of teaching as a career is often linked to the fact that teachers' work hours overlap with children's school hours, enabling women to balance child-rearing responsibilities with career responsibilities.

Access for women to higher education in PNG is low in comparison to men in PNG (Yeoman, 1985; Seta, 1992; Tuaru, 1996; Flaherty & Gutuma, 2003; National Education Statistics, 2005). Gender segmentation of the schooling workforce is being reinforced not challenged, by the patterns of professional development (Bacchus 1996). All training for teachers should incorporate an equal opportunities element and there would be an advantage in reviewing current equal opportunities components of further training. Research has also shown that many women who have struggled to make it to higher education institutions still have difficulties and consequently opt to drop out (Tuaru, 1996; Flaherty & Gutuma, 2003).

Papua New Guinea is signatory to many international conventions that are designed to protect the rights of girls and women to education. One of these is *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination* (United Nations General Assembly, 1979). The Convention calls for the elimination of discrimination against women in order to ensure equal rights with men in the field of education. It asks for the same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and obtaining of diplomas at all levels of schooling. The Convention requests access to the same curricula and examinations, to scholarships and other study grants and to programs of continuing education. It addresses the drop-out rates of female students and asks for the provision of special programs for girls who leave school prematurely. It recognizes the need to eliminate stereotyped roles of men and women at all levels and in all aspects of education (*UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999*).

The aim of all involved in education should be to eliminate prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and other practices which deny people their rights to develop fully and participate in society as equal citizens (Turner et al., 1993). The difficulties faced by rural and urban women in their daily lives reveal that many of the problems result from lack of education (Nagari, 1985). While education and training do not automatically improve women's position

in society, they do make it much easier for women to develop their potential. Lack of education limits women's chances of finding employment. Nagari (1985) argued that some parents have seen that education can help women improve in their traditional roles as wives and mothers as well as train them for employment. Ngari (1985:117) found that women who had attended national high schools and colleges had concentrated in typical female service-oriented jobs such as primary school teaching, nursing, typing and secretarial work. However this may have changed in the past twenty years.

PNG is a male dominated society (Dobunaba, 1995). In 2001, the Gender-related Development Index of the United Nations rated PNG 110th out of 146 countries (United Nations, 2001). The UN report argued that gender inequality remained a severe impediment to development and one of the most visible violations of human rights. The report stated that in no province was female achievement equal to male achievement in areas such as schooling, employment or access to resources and services. It indicated that females had lower life expectancy at birth, lower educational attainment, and fewer opportunities to earn income or participate in political decision-making.

Although the current poor economic conditions have some effect on women's advancement, the difficulties they face in even obtaining a basic education form one of the major factors which hinder their progress from gaining enrolment in the first year of school to positioning themselves for university entry (Geissinger, 1997). An important contributor to low female enrolment rates in education is the cost factor. If a family decides to educate a child, culture and economics usually favour the male. Customs and traditions also have an impact on girls' school attendance and drop-out rates (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999).

In developing countries, women are increasingly entering colleges and universities. However, a United Nations report indicated that there are socio-economic and cultural obstacles for women's access to further education. In addition, poor health and nutrition, early pregnancy and marriage further aggravate the situation (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999).

Women's participation in education opportunities is a focus of activities of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) in PNG. Their objectives embrace the AusAID *Gender and Development Policy* (2008) and the goals of *The Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea*, (GOPNG, 1975). Key objectives of the gender policy are to improve women's access to education and to promote women's participation and leadership in decision-making at all levels. AusAID has an Education Capacity Building Program (ECBP) in PNG. The ECBP supports activities designed to address these aspects of equity, with a particular focus on gender equity. AusAID programs are a stimulus for promoting equal opportunities for both women and men as participants and beneficiaries of development.

In a research study of gender issues in training programs for teachers in Pakistan, Sales (2000) found that teaching continues to provide the vast majority of formal sector jobs available to women. Within teaching, women's restricted access to training was being addressed by localised training. Nevertheless, women remain largely unrepresented beyond the lowliest levels of the service.

Sales (2000) argued for a contextualised, gender-aware approach to teacher education, and an avoidance of a simple correlation between girls' and women's education and their broader empowerment. She contended that the workplace was important as both the reference point for learning (skills acquired should be those needed for workplace improvement) and as the place where learning occurs. More professional development needed to be school-based, school-focused, school-devised and school-controlled. However, Bacchus (1996) argued that in most developing countries, the school environment does not provide role models or facilitators with expertise to help them continue growing in their professional and career life.

Distance education provides one of the few opportunities by which Papua New Guineans can gain further education while, at the same time, continuing to work and contributing to income generation to support the family. Traditional attitudes often prevail in decisions concerning whether females should undertake further studies which may improve their job opportunities (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 1999).

Gender equity for women in employment

In Papua New Guinea, one of the Government's aims is to provide equal job opportunities for men and women. However, the reality is that most of the executive positions in the public service and the private sector are occupied by men (Dobunaba, 1995; White, 2007). Research (Flaherty, 1998) indicates that women want equal representation in the workforce where men have dominated and a greater understanding of the barriers is needed.

Very low girls' participation in primary and secondary education in many developing countries makes it less plausible for many women to be able to acquire the skills, training and competencies necessary for professional positions in education. Education is seen as having little relevance to the future roles envisaged for daughters in developing countries (Brown & Ralph, 1996; Dickenson et al., Jayaweera, 1997; Schultz, 1998; Sales, 1999).

It was documented by Wormald and Crossley (1988), Thirtwall and Avalos (1993), and Flaherty (1998), that successful education at a higher level would result in potential for greater wage earning. This notion has been transmitted internally by parents to daughters. Parents have encouraged young women in their abilities to succeed and influenced them so that they would adopt realistic career goals. Regardless of male teachers presence in both rural and urban schools, female teachers have placed high priority on education and

employment for achieving equity and building a better future for themselves and their families (Flaherty, 1998:84).

For some writers, the major barrier to women's advancement refers to the family responsibilities that the majority of women in developing countries hold (Brown & Ralph, 1996; Olser, 1997; Coleman, 2002; Celikten, 2005). In traditional societies, women are expected to be responsible for their families, including remaining close to their children, the husband, and the extended family. Flaherty, (1998) confirmed that some teachers faced difficulties and tensions in leading their own lives as teachers and mothers as well as striving to carry out cultural duties as daughters. Heavy domestic responsibilities and husband's resistance are identified by both male and female teachers in Kenya as barriers to career advancement (Olser 1997).

Data from the research of Kagoda (2004) indicates that women are still regarded as second/third class citizens in some parts of Uganda. Female teachers in rural areas are still dominated by men and traditional culture. The male dominated education structures discourage female teachers to aspire for more education and promotion. Similarly, the research findings of Yeoman (1985) in the PNG context showed an underlying factor causing gender inequities in employment or promotion stemmed from the entrenched deeply rooted cultural beliefs that women are secondary to men, attitudes that still exist in the mentality of the many decision makers. This was a common theme highlighted in comments of the informants whether it was coming from a student, lecturer or an administrator of the two case universities (University of Papua New Guinea and University of Goroka).

Another implication that has a great impact in hindering women advancing professionally relates to the women themselves in allowing these entrenched, stereotypical attitudes to stand in their way of advancement. Social and cultural changes will be required in order for women to experience equality in the work, privileges, and design of society. Even when they have the advantages of training, education and visibility, there remains a traditional view of women and their relative place in PNG society. The exact ways in which to affect these changes are yet to be noted with any predictable consistency.

Flaherty (2003:49) claimed that PNG women have entered a world where the barriers between men's work and women's work as determined by traditional roles have dissipated. Women are in public life as parliamentarians, doctors, teachers, lawyers and engineers. Yet despite equality in the workplace, the majority of women are unfairly treated and represented in the decision making roles (Flaherty, 1998; Giris & Rynkiewich, 2005; Nongkas, 2007).

Many PNG educated men are aware of the changing role of women, yet adhere to traditional customs which hinder the advancement of women as equal partners with them. It seems that while men themselves are willing to adapt to many non-traditional roles, they want the security of knowing that, in a rapidly changing world, their women will remain confined to customary roles of

caretaking the home, producing food, producing offspring and being in the kitchen (Nagari, 1985:119).

Women have much to contribute to the development of society as men, yet the education of women has caused insecurity among men, who believe that educated women will compete for their jobs (Nagari, 1985). In her research, Sai (2008) found that educated men in PNG, while respecting women's ambitions to be educated, still prefer women to occupy supportive roles and not to be in equal or senior positions in an organization. This was attributed to their traditional beliefs and traditions concerning roles of women.

I interviewed forty men who occupy very senior key positions in the public and private sector on how they see the role of women in the workforce and most have said they would rather see women in supportive roles and not in leadership roles. While they don't mind women participating, they are not prepared to accept them as equals or as bosses. Much of this perspective, I believe has to do with traditional beliefs and traditions which most men based on research identify with. They prefer women to play supportive roles.

(Sai, in interview with Aiva Tamata, 2008)

The United Nations 2001 report on Papua New Guinea stated that raising the awareness and sensitivity of men to gender issues cannot be over-emphasised. It found that men hold most of the positions of power in PNG. The report argued that until these men are convinced that empowering women does not threaten them, it will be difficult for women alone to achieve equality (United Nations, 2001). Women and men with the same educational qualifications reach different levels in occupational status; the men having easier access to formal sector employment, managerial and technical jobs or entrepreneurship (Jayaweera, 1997).

Women teachers often function in at least two conflicting roles of family and career. They are socialized since childhood to be nurturers and supporters of others, but first and foremost to their families. Within this framework, they assess their self-worth and identity on the quality of relationships (Adams, 1979; Gilligan, 1993). Maintenance of these relationships is paramount in both family and professional arenas. The usual reasons given for why women do not attain higher positions are that both their family commitments and family problems (such as husband's opposition to their work or domestic violence) make it difficult for them to devote the time and energy and creativity that would make them eligible for promotion (Avalos, 1995).

The opportunity to participate or suggest ways of doing things to those above their rank is often not made easy, especially by males who fear that their own status may be eroded. If there is a nurturing atmosphere that encourages participation, women are able to assert their views and stand greater chances of influencing decision making (Gibson 1995).

Women and leadership in education in developing countries

Literature regarding gender leadership issues has mainly focused on western countries and the case for developing countries has been marginalised (Dimmock & Walker, 1998, 2005). In this sense, we know very little about the lives and careers of women in educational administration within developing countries. Oplatka (2006) argues that there is a need for research that examines the career experiences, leadership orientations, and subjective voices of women in educational administration within developing countries. The need for women in leadership positions in schools in developing countries is important to ensure sensitivity within schools for the wellbeing of adolescent girls, to provide girls beginning to consider career choices with role models of women decision-makers and leaders, and to address issues of social justice by providing gender equity between adults within the education profession (Sperandio & Kagoda, 2008). Themes that emerged from the literature were barriers to career advancement, strategies used by women to access leadership positions, female leadership styles, and career experiences of women in educational administration.

Barriers to women in leadership

Some well-known barriers to women holding leadership positions in developed countries include gender discrimination, women's low self-confidence and job-family conflicts. However, Oplatka (2006) found that others, such as cultural background, the important role of the man, strong family obligations, low levels of girls' participation in primary education and the majority of teaching positions being held by men, seemed to be particular to developing countries.

A major barrier to women's access to leadership positions in schools refers to the cultural and social structure that divides a society into male and female spheres of responsibility. Entrenched cultural norms of many developing countries attribute certain tasks and spheres of responsibility to each gender, assuming that one must behave in accordance with the social expectations of being either male or female (Celikten, 2005; Su et al., 2000; Sidani, 2005). Leadership positions, in this sense, belong to male members of the society and women should refrain from attempting to attain this kind of position. Otherwise they are susceptible to various social sanctions, such as reduced chances to marry (Cubillo & Brown, 2003).

The usual reasons given for why women in PNG do not attain higher positions are that both their family commitments and family problems (such as husband's opposition to their work or domestic violence) make it difficult for them to devote the time and energy and creativity that would make them eligible for promotion (Avalos 1995). Although female leadership qualities are gaining credibility, men and women continue to expect leaders to be men (Stivers, 1993).

The literature indicates that studies conducted in developing countries reveal a wide variety of discriminative behaviours towards women in educational

administration. Male teachers are preferred by authorities to hold educational leadership positions in Uganda (Brown & Ralph, 1996), Pakistan (Sales, 1999), China (Su et al., 2000), Turkey (Celikten, 2005), and many Asian countries. Male dominance in educational administration hinders the leadership opportunities of many women (Shakeshaft, 1989; Limerick & Lingard, 1995). For example, male dominance of key leadership positions is likely to lead to recruiting new principals who resemble their sponsors in attitude, philosophy, deed and appearance, hobbies, club membership, i.e. men (Hill & Ragland, 1995).

In all sectors of education, men are more likely than women to achieve promotion to senior posts in management (Kay, 2000). Obviously the skills of leadership are not biologically rooted or genetically determined but rather shaped, facilitated, or stunted by social forces and the entire process of socialization (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980:40). The low numbers of women in management positions can no longer be attributed to gender differences in leadership style and the inability of women to conform to the organizational structure (Barnett & McCormick, 2004).

The socialization experiences of women leaders often vary with their abilities and attitudes and how they present their professional identity. However, there are several socialization forces that can be noted from the literature. They involve cultural expectations with their impact upon leadership style, mentors, networking, balance of personal and professional life, family background and community power bases. The perception that women are nurturers and supporters, rather than leaders, persists as the overall societal view (Epp, 1993; Lipman-Blumen, et al., 1996; Sherman & Repa, 1994; Stivers, 1993; Swiss, 1996). The cultural and social assumption that women are less strong than men and therefore cannot hold managerial positions is common in many developing countries (Calvert & Calvert, 1996).

When the majority of teachers in developing countries are male, it is hardly surprising that there are so few women in leadership positions in school. Attempts at mobilizing women into leadership roles have faltered for a variety of reasons, including the denial of emerging class differences, the fear of being labelled elitist and Westernized, the reluctance to identify as feminist, and a genuine concern not to antagonize men and be accused of destabilizing family, clan, and community solidarity (King, Lee & Warakai 1985).

Although women, in comparison to men, have an important role in agricultural economic activities in Papua New Guinea, their quality of life is poor in terms of health, social support, protection of rights, level of participation in decision making, primary education, higher education, employment, promotion and attaining positions of leadership. The contributing factors are complex, stemming partly from conflicts between traditional culture and modernisation, partly from lack of employment opportunities especially in urban areas, and partly from the attitude of those involved in development who assume that women are assistants or supporters but not protagonists in the process (Avalos, 1995).

Recruiting and retaining women teachers have become priority strategies for improving girls' education in many developing countries (Brown & Ralph, 1996; Fentiman et al., 1999; Sales, 1999; Kirk, 2004). This implies that understanding the particular barriers to women's advancement or access into teaching positions in developing countries might contribute to the development of strategies for career promotion that are compatible with the organizational and social contexts of women in these countries. Exploring the lives and careers of women principals in PNG may tell us a lot about the experiences these women undergo on their way to leadership positions.

Women's under-representation in leadership positions may be attributed also to women's own decision not to apply for promotion in education for a variety of reasons, such as lack of necessary aspirations, lack of awareness of the promotion system and a lack of confidence that they will succeed, gender-based socialization, fear of failure, and lack of competitiveness (Acker, 1989; Limerick & Anderson, 1999; Coffey & Delamont, 2000).

A few writers argued that women's low confidence and self-esteem with respect to their management capabilities are likely to stunt women's career advancement in school. Research conducted in Turkey showed that women do not apply to be principals, even when they are as well qualified as the male applicants, because they have negative self-perceptions and lack confidence in their qualifications and experience (Turan & Ebiclioglu, 2002).

Bacchus (1996) argues that in most developing countries, the school environment doesn't provide role models for teachers to help them continue growing in their professional and career life. There have been a lot of barriers such as lack of mentors, problems of juggling home and career, and lack of support from senior executives, that act as an invisible ceiling which hinder women's advancement from middle to senior management (Catherine, 2007:1).

Strategies to empower women to exercise leadership

When women are empowered to exercise leadership at all levels, it is not just in the service of women, but as a contribution to the betterment of society as a whole. The question raised in a few studies concerned the ways by which women in educational leadership positions managed to reach their position in spite of many obstacles they had to face. After all, despite the barriers women have to confront in school, some women in developing countries do secure leadership positions.

Cubillo and Brown (2003) found that the common denominator for the small number of women administrators in developing nations was their strong belief in themselves, particularly their own voice, and their strong motivation to be pathfinders in their countries. The researchers found that their women interviewees emerged as extremely self-reliant and self-motivated in spite of having faced unwelcoming, even hostile, male-dominated cultures in some of the developing countries they came from.

For increasing women's belief and confidence in their abilities, women were found to need moral support and a sense of trust from their families (Olser, 1997), as well as extensive mass educational programs coupled with conscious efforts to change traditional values (Handleman, 2000). These findings are consistent with reports on African-American women administrators indicating that family, culture and spiritual experiences in their childhood positively influenced their advancement (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Similarly, a firm belief in their competence and abilities to improve education was a contributing factor for seeking administrative posts among Bedouin female principals in Israel (Aburabia-Queder, 2006) and among Hispanic women in America (Mendez-Morse, 2004).

Gendered leadership styles

As far as differences in leadership styles of men and women were concerned, two contradictory views appear in the literature. Some researchers found no substantial evidence for gender differences in educational leadership (Jirasinghe & Lyons, 1996; Mertz & McNeely, 1998). Others argued strongly that men and women do differ in the ways they manage people, although the differences were not considered to be innate, but, rather, the outcome of different socialization patterns where females develop in a context of caring, nurturing and empowerment of others (Evetts, 1994; Marshall, 1995; Regan & Brooks, 1995).

It was argued that women are more service oriented toward people, use power as an expandable resource to empower others, and utilize participatory problem-solving processes that feature cooperation instead of authoritative control (Baber & Allen, 1992). Female principals commonly tend to adopt a democratic, participative style, to pay much attention to vision-building for the school, to spend much time in change initiation and implementation, and to be attuned to curriculum and teaching issues (Eagly et al., 1992; Marshall, 1995; Fennell, 1999; Oplatka, 2003). Interestingly, from the few reports on women's leadership styles in developing countries, it seems that women adopt an 'androgenic' style, i.e. a combination of 'masculine' and 'feminine' leadership styles, that derives, by and large, from the strong male-dominant values in developing nations, coupled with women's own tendencies and needs (Adkison, 1981).

The research literature suggested that successful female educational leaders do not have aggressive, argumentative personalities or career paths filled with negative relationships and enemies. Characteristics of female leadership styles included: fairness with a practice of equity and objectivity, empathy without sympathy, an interest in people, an ability to listen without judgment, and a detached politeness which allow personal feelings and emotions to be controlled (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980; Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992; Porat, 1991). Research by Greenfield (1994:44) reveals that women continue to value the personal perspective and engage in relationship building as a keystone of

their leadership. They also tend to combine these roles in a way that portrays their values or attitudes about significant relationships.

The career experiences of women in educational administration

Few articles have been published about the lives and career experiences of women administrators in educational systems of developing countries. Three characteristics are drawn from the limited literature available.

First, the family, and especially the father, has a key role in the career advancement and leadership of women in developing countries. Cubillo & Brown (2003) showed that parental support was paramount to all their respondents from nine different countries. All of the women in their study identified their fathers as a seminal influence in their early education and subsequent careers. Along the same lines, Olser (1997) found that Kenyan teachers saw their own career success not exclusively as an individual achievement but as something achieved with the support of family and community on behalf of the wider community.

Second, female principals reported having difficulty facing their staff, sometimes even the female staff, as in Trinidad and Tobago (Morris, 1999) and in Turkey (Celikten, 2005). The reluctance of women teachers to work with women principals was found to be a problem in Turkey (Celikten, 2005). Some Turkish women principals believed that the male teachers found them threatening (Cubillo & Brown, 2003).

Third, some career experiences of women principals refer to 'normal' difficulties every manager is supposedly faced with. Research (Wong & Cheuk, 2005) that examined the stress levels of female kindergarten principals in Macau, China, found that their work was moderately stressful. The authors concluded that these principals were coping quite successfully with the demands of their work in providing an education for young children. The areas of their work they found to be the most difficult to deal with were the recruiting of a sufficient number of students and sustaining a balanced or surplus budget. These concerns were not related to their gender, but to the economic contexts of kindergarten teaching in that country (Wong & Cheuk, 2005).

Adkison (1981) suggested that among the possible topics for research in this field are the role of mentors in guidance, support, encouragement and facilitation of female leadership development, the influences of foreign professionals upon women's progress in developing countries, forms of direct and latent gender discrimination in school, and the internalization of gender stereotypes and aspiration to principalship.

Government policies of relevance to women teachers in PNG

One factor affecting opportunities for women teachers in Papua New Guinea is the governmental policy toward gender equality and equity in the public sector. Governments hold the primary responsibility for ensuring the realization of the

rights of women. The Government of Papua New Guinea has made commitments to numerous national and international conventions and declarations that recognize the importance of gender equity in this country. These include the Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, Declaration on the Right to Development, the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development, the Pacific Plan of Action on Gender Advancement, the PNG Platform for Action on Women and Development, the Medium Term Development Strategy, the Program of Action on Population and Development, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, the United Nations Millennium Development goals, the policies of the Australian Agency for International Development, Education For All and the PNG National Gender Equity in Education Policy

With such an overwhelming number of policies designed to ensure equitable outcomes for women in Papua New Guinea, the issue is why there are twice as many men primary teachers than women primary teachers in the Madang Province and an overall gender imbalance throughout the country.

Conclusion

This article has presented a critical synthesis of the scholarly literature on gender issues for women Papua New Guinea, with a particular interest in issues for women teachers. The paper reveals the complexity of the problem and the many dimensions that are part of gender issues not only in Papua New Guinea, but also in other developing countries. The section on cultural dimensions is particularly relevant to the issue of male dominance in the PNG context, ways this is entrenched and difficulties faced by women to counteract it. Other sections have highlighted characteristics and gender issues associated with education and further training, employment and leadership. There is no doubt that Papua New Guinea has numerous policies that embrace gender equity and this research study is aimed at shedding light on how that are being implemented and barriers that exist.

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